

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY

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FOR THE SECRETARY FROM THE AMBASSADOR

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TAGS: PFOR, LE

SUBJECT: LEBANESE SITUATION

REF: (A) STATE 01318 (B) STATE 013817

SUMMARY: I DISCUSSED LEBANON WITH FOREIGN MINISTER SAUVAGNARGUES TUESDAY NIGHT. HE AND GISCARD ARE VERY CONCERNED ABOUT THE DETERIORATING SITUATION. WITHIN PAST FEW DAYS, FRANCE HAS EXPLORED POSSIBILITY OF SECURITY COUNCIL INITIATIVE, BUT WAS DISCOURAGED BY LEBANESE GOVERNMENT. FRENCH HAVE ALSO BEEN INFORMED THAT ASSAD OF SYRIA AND FRANGIE ARE NEGOTIATING AGAIN, AND SYRIANS SAY THAT FRANGIE IS NOW FAVORABLE TO PROPOSALS SIMILAR TO THOSE HE REJECTED DECEMBER 3L. IF THIS SECOND SYRIAN INITIATIVE FAILS, AND ALL PARTIES AGREE, SAUVAGNARGUES SAID IT IS NOT EXCLUDED THAT FRANCE MIGHT TRY AGAIN. BUT SAUVAGNARGUES FINDING IT VERY DIFFICULT TO COME UP WITH WORKABLE OPTION. END SUMMARY.

1. SAUVAGNARGUES RECEIVED ME LATE TUESDAY NIGHT SHORTLY AFTER HIS RETURN FROM AN ALL-DAY EC-9 FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING IN LUXEMBOURG.

2. SAUVAGNARGUES AGREED WITH OUR ESTIMATE OF THE SITUATION AS SUMMARIZED REFTEL (B). GOF CONCURS THAT CONFLICT HAS BADLY DETERIORATED IN PAST TWO WEEKS, DUE MAINLY TO EFFORT BY CHRISTIANS TO BRING ABOUT DE FACTO MILITARY PARTITION. I THEREFORE CONCENTRATED ON TRANSMITTING POINTS CONTAINED REFTEL (A), STRESSING THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY ACTION TO BRING ABOUT A POLITICAL SOLUTION ACCEPTABLE TO ALL ELEMENTS IN LEBANON. I EXPLAINED WHY IT WOULD BE TACTICALLY UNWISE FOR THE U.S. TO TAKE THE LEAD IN ANY NEW INITIATIVE, AND EXPRESSED OUR VIEW THAT FOR HISTORICAL AND POLICY REASONS, FRANCE IS IN BEST POSITION TO WIN CONFIDENCE OF BOTH MOSLEMS AND CHRISTIANS. I TOLD SAUVAGNARGUES THAT MAJOR FRENCH INITIATIVE COULD COUNT ON U.S. SUPPORT, WORKING THROUGH ISRAELIS, SAUDIS AND EGYPTIANS AND OTHERS AS REQUIRED.

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3. SAUVAGNARGUES REPLIED THAT HE AND GISCARD HAVE BEEN AGONIZING OVER LEBANESE CRISIS FOR THE PAST TEN DAYS, FEELING THAT SOMETHING SHOULD BE DONE, BUT UNABLE TO COME UP WITH A REALLY VIABLE FORMULA. ON JANUARY 17, SAUVAGNARGUES STARTED EXPLORING POSSIBLE SECURITY COUNCIL INITIATIVE. MESSAGES WERE SENT TO KARAMI AND FRANGIE. KARAMI WAS IN PROCESS OF RE-SIGNING, AND WAS THEREFORE NOT IN A POSITION TO COMMENT.

FRANGIE WAS TOTALLY NEGATIVE ABOUT FRENCH PROPOSAL, ARGUING THAT PROBLEM CONTINUES TO BE STRICTLY AN INTERNAL MATTER. LEBANESE FOREIGN MINISTER SUGGESTED FRENCH, U.S., SOVIET TRIPARTITE MEDIATION, BUT GOF REJECTED THIS AS TOTALLY UNREALISTIC.

4. AFTER FURTHER INTERNAL DEBATE, SAUVAGNARGUES DECIDED JANUARY 19 TO SUGGEST THAT SAUDIS AND EGYPTIANS RAISE MATTER IN SECURITY COUNCIL. THIS IDEA WAS TRIED OUT ON SYRIANS WHO RESPONDED NEGATIVELY IN CABLE FROM DAMASCUS JANUARY 20. SYRIANS EXPLAINED THAT ASAD AND FRANGIE ARE IN DIRECT COMMUNICATION ABOUT A POLITICAL SOLUTION, AND THAT FRANGIE APPEARS TO BE ON VERGE OF ACCEPTING PROPOSALS SIMILAR TO THOSE HE AND CHAMOUN REJECTED LAST DECEMBER 31. SAUVAGNARGUES QUICKLY POINTED OUT THAT SYRIANS ARE SAYING THIS, AND CONFIRMATION FROM FRANGIE IS STILL PENDING.

5. ACCORDING TO GOF REPORT FROM DAMASCUS, NEW ASAD PROPOSAL CALLS FOR EQUALITY OF SEATS IN ASSEMBLY, WITH PRESIDENT ELECTED BY ASSEMBLY AND ALL FORMER PRESIDENTS SITTING TOGETHER. THIS WOULD ASSURE ELECTION OF CHRISTIAN PRESIDENT. THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD BE ELECTED BY THE ASSEMBLY SITTING ALONE, WHICH WOULD ASSURE ELECTION OF MOSLEM PRIME MINISTER. THE TWO PLO AGREEMENTS WOULD BE MAINTAINED, AND A DE FACTO CEASE FIRE WOULD BE AGREED WITHOUT ANY ANNOUNCEMENT BEING MADE.

6. SAUVAGNARGUES SAID THAT ON BASIS OF THIS LATEST REPORT ABOUT ASAD-FRANGIE NEGOTIATIONS, HE IS INCLINED TO PROBE FURTHER TO DETERMINE HOW REAL THIS NEW
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MEDIATION EFFORT IS BEFORE CONSIDERING ANY POSSIBLE FRENCH INITIATIVE. IN ANY EVENT, GOF COULD NOT PROCEED WITHOUT AGREEMENT OF SYRIANS WHO ARE NOT LIKELY TO APPROVE ANY FRENCH ACTION UNTIL CURRENT EFFORT IS TOTALLY EXHAUSTED. THE NEXT STEP, THEREFORE, IS TO CHECK WITH FRANGIE AND ASAD TO FIND OUT WHAT IS GOING ON.

7. AS A MATTER OF POLICY, SAUVAGNARGUES SAID HE AND GISCARD ARE AGREED THAT IF LEBANESE SITUATION DETERIORATES TO THE WORST POINT, THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY MUST STEP IN TO MAINTAIN THE INTEGRITY OF THE COUNTRY. HIS ANALYSIS, HOWEVER, IS THAT A BREAK-UP OF THE COUNTRY IS NOT LIKELY BECAUSE BOTH SYRIA AND ISRAEL ARE OPPOSED TO THIS HAPPENING. HE EXPECTS,

THEREFORE, THAT SITUATION WILL CONTINUE TO DETERIORATE INTERNALLY WITH NO SOLID BASIS DEVELOPING FOR OUTSIDE INTERVENTION. THERE IS HEAVY FRENCH PUBLIC PRESSURE FOR INTERVENTION, SAUVAGNARGUES SAID, BUT HE CANNOT ENVISAGE STEPPING IN WITHOUT ALIENATING EITHER OR BOTH SIDES. THE CHRISTIANS INTERPRET FRENCH INTERVENTION AS PROVIDING PROTECTION AGAINST THE MOSLEMS. THE MODERATE ARABS INTERPRET FRENCH INTERVENTION AS PROVIDING PROTECTION AGAINST THE PLO. I ARGUED THAT WAITING UNTIL THE SITUATION DETERIORATES TO ITS WORST POINT MEANS WAITING UNTIL THE SITUATION IS PROBABLY BEYOND REDEMPTION.

8. SUMMING UP, SAUVAGNARGUES SAID THAT WE MUST FIRST DETERMINE IF THERE IS ANY CHANCE FOR INTERNAL AGREEMENT UNDER SYRIAN AUSPICES. IF THE CURRENT SYRIAN EFFORT FAILS, AND IF THERE IS SOLID U.S. AND ARAB BACKING, A FRENCH INITIATIVE CANNOT BE EXCLUDED. BECAUSE OF THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE SITUATION, AND BECAUSE OF THE HISTORY OF THE COUVE DE MURVILLE MISSION, IT MIGHT BE BETTER FOR FRANCE TO CHAIR A SMALL MULTILATERAL EFFORT (THREE OR FOUR COUNTRIES) RATHER THAN ACT ALONE, BUT THIS IS SOMETHING FOR FURTHER REFLECTION. THE KEY COUNTRY REMAINS SYRIA WHOSE COOPERATION AND APPROVAL ARE A PREREQUISITE. FINALLY, THE CORE PROBLEM IS TO FIND A FORMULA THAT CAN WORK. NOTHING THOUGHT
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OF SO FAR HAS HAD THE VIRTUE OF GIVING THE CHRISTIANS A FEELING OF SECURITY WHICH THEY ARE SEEKING IN PARTITION, OR IN SUCH A BADLY DETERIORATED SITUATION THAT THE U.S. WOULD BE FORCED TO INTERVENE MILITARY, A COMPLETELY UNREALISTIC HOPE. I AGAIN STRESSED THE NEED TO TAKE A DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVE NOW TO PREVENT THE SITUATION FROM DETERIORATING BEYOND THE POINT OF NO RETURN, AND THAT FRANCE IS THE MOST QUALIFIED GOVERNMENT TO TAKE THAT INITIATIVE.

9. SAUVAGNARGUES SAID HE WOULD TRY TO CONVEY THE MESSAGE TO GISCARD ON WEDNESDAY, AND THAT HE LOOKED FORWARD TO DISCUSSING THIS FURTHER WITH THE SECRETARY IN BRUSSELS AT THE END OF THE WEEK. HE AGREED THAT FOR THE TIME BEING, THIS DISCUSSION SHOULD BE CONFINED TO BILATERAL CHANNEL.

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